

Washington DC— Congressman Joe Sestak (D-PA) voted today for the passage of a bill that requires within 60 days of enactment—and every 90 days thereafter—that the Secretary of Defense submit to the Defense Committees in Congress a report on the status of planning for the redeployment of U.S. armed forces from Iraq. — Congressman Sestak issued the following statement about redeployment from Iraq:

“Few understand the enormity of the task of redeploying 160,000 troops and over 50,000 U.S. contractors out of Iraq. There are not only tactical, but immense logistical, challenges that are involved in such a redeployment and that need to be fully understood by Congress as it weighs the proper timeframe such an event would take. While many may say we must have an ‘immediate redeployment,’ in order to ensure the safety of our troops, it will take at least a year, probably at least 15 to 24 months, to complete a full redeployment. We have 65 Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) in Iraq. Conservatively, it will take 100 days to close one FOB, and balancing how many to close at one time with calculations about surrounding strife, will be critical. Additionally, Kuwait’s receiving facilities to clean and package vehicles for customs and shipment back to the United States can only handle 2 to 2 ½ brigade combat teams (BCTs) at a time, and there are currently 40 BCT-equivalents in Iraq.

Redeployment is the most vulnerable of military operations, particularly because this one will be down a single road, leading from Iraq to Kuwait – “Road Tampa.” Troops will also be airlifted out of Iraq to minimize casualties from Improvised Explosive Devices placed on the ground, while their vehicles and equipment will be placed on Heavy Equipment Transporters (HETs) that will need to be in tightly-secured convoys on the road to Kuwait. We must recognize from our experience in Somalia how challenging a redeployment is, where it took six months to extract 6,300 troops safely that required another 19,000 to be inserted into the region to protect their redeployment.

The reason I support this legislation is that it is important: (1) for the Executive Branch to ensure proper planning has been done for such a redeployment, in view of its failure to ensure we were fully prepared for other aspects of this war, and (2) for Congress to understand the enormity—and length of time it will take – of such a redeployment to ensure the safety of our troops during it.

Ending this war is necessary. But how we end it is of even greater importance for both our security and our troops’ safety. With regard to America’s security, our Army will rapidly unravel if redeployment from Iraq does not begin before Spring 2008. Today, 40 percent of all U.S. Army equipment is in Iraq; there is no Army unit now at home in a state of readiness able to deploy anywhere another contingency might occur in the world, and we must get below the ‘pre-surge’ level if we are ever to regain the readiness of our units at home to be prepared to respond to other contingencies.

Because our Army must either start a lengthy redeployment or risk unraveling, today we have the catalysts for a bi-partisan agreement to end this war with a stable Iraq by work with Iran and Syria to help ensure a stable accommodation in Iraq once our troops redeploy."

On July 12, 2007, the President delivered to Congress the Initial Benchmark Assessment Report on Iraq required by the U.S. Troop Readiness, Veteran's Care, Katrina Recovery, and Iraq Accountability Appropriations Act of 2007. The benchmark report stated that the President is pursuing a multi-pronged strategy "designed to set the conditions for U.S. troops to begin coming home, without risking a humanitarian catastrophe in Iraq, sanctuaries for international terrorist networks, or a broader regional conflict that would threaten U.S. national security interests for generations."

In view of the President's statement above, by passing this legislation today, Congress adds its own recognition that the redeployment of U.S. forces from Iraq will be a complex task – one that requires comprehensive and robust contingency planning, which the Congress wants to ensure is being done.

Today's legislation requires that within 14 days of the submission of the initial report the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff brief the Congressional Defense Committees on the matters contained in the initial report. In addition, within 14 days of the submission of every required report thereafter, senior defense officials would be required to brief the Congressional Committees on the matters contained in the reports.

The Armed Services Committee has indicated that it expects that the reports and briefings would not include the full operational details of contingency plans for all redeployment scenarios. However, the Committee does expect that such reports and briefings will include significant substantive details on the nature and scope of the contingency plans being developed, and significant issues arising under those plans.

The legislation will allow the reporting requirement to lapse when the Secretary of Defense submits to the Congressional Defense Committees a written certification that U.S. Armed Forces are no longer primarily engaged in a combat mission in Iraq.

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.